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FILE ONLY

Joyful TV Reporter Levin Reunited With Family

By George Boehmer
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FRANKFURT, Feb. 15—Jeremy Levin, the kidnaped American journalist who says he escaped after 11 months in captivity, arrived here tonight for an emotional reunion with his wife and children.

"Fantastic, just fantastic!" Levin shouted to reporters who asked how he felt after flying into the U.S. Rhein-Main Air Base at about 11 p.m. (5 p.m. EST) on an executive jet chartered by Cable News Network.

Levin was Beirut bureau chief for CNN when he was kidnaped there last March. He was turned over to U.S. custody in Damascus earlier today.

There was applause when he stepped from the plane. Then he embraced and kissed his wife, Lucille, daughter Clare and son Clarence, and exchanged hugs with his brother-in-law, Frances Hare.

[In Washington, a senior U.S. official, who asked not to be identified, said Friday that there are some indications that Levin may have been allowed to escape and that there are grounds for thinking Syria had something to do with it.

["What one has there is a process in which undoubtedly the Syrians must have played a role, but it

is a complicated process, and we don't know what roles different parties played." Whatever happens in the Bekaa Valley, he said, is related to the Syrian presence.

[He called news reports that four other Americans might soon be released "informed speculation" and said that he had no information about when they might be freed.

[At a briefing for reporters, State Department spokesman Ed Djerejian said of the Syrians' role in Levin's release, "We are very

appreciative of the Syrian government's role in this matter." When pressed about the nature of that role and whether Levin escaped or was released, he said, "You will have to draw your own conclusions" based on what Levin and the Syrians are saying.]

At the Air Force base, American officials formed a semicircle around the group, and then the Levins walked past journalists to four Mercedes sedans for the 20-mile drive to a U.S. Air Force hospital in Wiesbaden. Levin looked healthy and rested as he got into one of the cars with his wife, waving and smiling broadly.

U.S. Embassy spokesman Robert Heath said Levin would undergo "routine medical checks," and it was not known when he would return to the United States.

"Mr. Levin has gone to the Wiesbaden Regional Medical Center for medical evaluation. When the evaluation is completed, the Levins will be returning to the United States on the same White House-provided C135 Air Force plane which brought Mrs. Levin and her companions to Frankfurt this morning," Heath said.

Levin, 52, said he discovered late Wednesday night that his captors had been "careless with the chains," and he worked free, tied three blankets together and lowered himself through a window of the apartment building that had been his prison in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley.

Earlier, he told reporters in Damascus that he walked for two hours through the Bekaa, which is occupied by the Syrian Army, and ran into a patrol near the ancient city of Baalbek. He said he hid from the soldiers at first, thinking they might be kidnapers trying to recapture him, then revealed himself and pleaded for help.

Levin said he could not identify his captors. The shadowy extremist group Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the abduction.

"I've been in solitary confinement for the whole time chained to the wall or a radiator The faces of the Syrian soldiers were the first faces I saw since March 7 of last year. They were good faces," he said.

In an interview today with CNN, Levin said, "I was treated miserably They could have been 100 percent better to me and I still would have been treated miserably.

"They were rough on me the first six months and then not really rough the second six months. The first six months they didn't beat me, but they would hit me around, swat me around, slap me, pound my back, pound my shoulders" He said the object was to teach him obedience, "and obedience for them was, 'Don't ever look at our faces or we'll kill you; don't ever look out the window or we'll kill you, don't even stand up or we'll kill you.'"

The soldiers turned Levin over to Syrian intelligence officers in Baalbek. He was taken to a Syrian Army base near the Lebanese-Syrian border, then to Damascus. He was turned over to Ambassador William Eagleton this morning at the Foreign Ministry and left two hours later for Frankfurt.

When Levin arrived at the ministry he appeared not to know exactly where he was. A journalist told him he would be turned over to the U.S. ambassador and that he was in Damascus at the Foreign Ministry.

"That is fantastic," he said, in tears. "The Orwellian year 1984 was not a very good one for me, but 1985 is starting out a hell of a lot better."

"Lucille, where is Lucille?" he said in a loud voice. When told his wife was waiting for him in Frankfurt, he gasped, saying, "I can't wait to see her. Please tell her I missed her very much and I love her so deeply."

He told reporters at the Foreign Ministry that he thought four other persons were held in the same house, on a hillside somewhere near Baalbek, but did not know whether they were Americans.

Levin said that when his captors took him to the bathroom, next to his room, he was always blindfolded and had to knock on the door when he was ready to go back to his room. He said he heard four other such knocks each

morning—apparently from the others signaling their guards. "But the voices were muffled, and I could not tell whether they were speaking English," he said.

Four other Americans disappeared or were kidnaped in Moslem west Beirut in the past year. They are William Buckley, a U.S. Embassy political officer; the Rev. Benjamin Weir, a Presbyterian minister; Peter Kilburn, a librarian at the American University of Beirut, and the Rev. Lawrence Jenco, a Roman Catholic priest.

Levin was seized and forced into a car March 7, 1984, on the west Beirut seafront.

An anonymous caller told a western news agency in Beirut after Levin's escape was reported that Islamic Jihad freed the journalist because it determined that he was not a spy and because of appeals from many people.